

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 5 1. An apparatus for providing virtual computing services to subscribers on a subscription basis, said apparatus comprising:
- a server computer operable to provide first computing services to a first subscriber of a plurality of subscribers enrolled in a subscription-based services program for the receipt of computing services and second computing services to a second subscriber of said plurality of subscribers enrolled in said subscription-based services program for the receipt of computing
10 services; and,
- wherein said server computer comprises a first non-volatile storage associated uniquely with said first subscriber and a second non-volatile storage associated uniquely with said second subscriber, said first non-volatile storage being configurable according to said first
15 subscriber and usable to provide said first computing services to said first subscriber, and said second non-volatile storage being configurable according to said second subscriber and usable to provide said second computing services to said second subscriber.
2. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said server computer is further operable to
20 configure said first non-volatile storage with a computer software program stored therein in accordance with a configuration option selected by said first subscriber.
3. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said computer software program comprises an operating system computer software program.
- 25 4. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said computer software program comprises an application computer software program.
5. The apparatus of Claim 4, wherein said application computer software program
30 comprises a word processing computer software program.

6. The apparatus of Claim 4, wherein said application computer software program comprises a electronic mail computer software program.

7. The apparatus of Claim 4, wherein said application computer software program
5 comprises a spreadsheet computer software program.

8. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said server computer is further operable to configure said first non-volatile storage with a selected storage capacity in accordance with a configuration option selected by said first subscriber.

10 9. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said server computer is further operable to configure said first non-volatile storage in accordance with configuration options paid for by said first subscriber.

15 10. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said server computer is further operable to establish a communication session with a subscriber device used by said first subscriber and to execute said computer software program stored in said first non-volatile storage during said communication session.

20 11. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said server computer is further operable to establish a communication session with a subscriber device used by said first subscriber and to interact with said subscriber device during said communication session via a user interface selectable by said first subscriber from a plurality of user interfaces.

25 12. The apparatus of Claim 11, wherein said server computer is further operable to receive data identifying a user interface selected by said first subscriber from said plurality of user interfaces, and to cause the display of said selected user interface on said subscriber device used by said first subscriber.

30 13. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said server computer is further operable to establish a communication session with a subscriber device used by said first subscriber and to

interact with said subscriber device during said communication session via a user interface, and wherein said server computer is further operable to receive data identifying a user interface normally utilized by said subscriber device and to cause the display of said normally utilized user interface on said subscriber device.

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14. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said server computer is further operable to configure said first non-volatile storage with a computer software program stored therein in accordance with a configuration option paid for by said first subscriber through payment of a subscription fee.

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15. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said server computer is further operable to configure said first non-volatile storage to have a storage capacity corresponding to a configuration option paid for by said first subscriber through payment of a subscription fee.

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16. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said server computer is further operable to replace said computer software program of said first non-volatile storage with a newer version of said computer software program in accordance with a configuration option selected by said first subscriber.

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17. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said server computer is further operable to update said computer software program of said first non-volatile storage with revisions to said computer software program in accordance with a configuration option selected by said first subscriber.

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18. A method for providing subscription-based virtual computing services to a subscriber, the method comprising the steps of:

enrolling a subscriber in a subscription-based computing services program for the provision of virtual computing services to the subscriber under the subscription-based computing services program through a virtual non-volatile storage allocated to the subscriber and accessible to the subscriber via a server computer during a communication session between the server

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computer and a subscriber device used by the subscriber, the virtual computing services corresponding to configuration options selectable by the subscriber;

enabling access to and use of the virtual non-volatile storage as desired by the subscriber via a server computer during a communication session between the server computer and the subscriber device; and,

charging the subscriber in accordance with selected configuration options received from the subscriber.

19. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enrolling comprises the steps of receiving selected configuration options from the subscriber via the subscriber device, and configuring the virtual non-volatile storage in accordance with the selected configuration options received from the subscriber.

20. The method of Claim 19, wherein one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including access to and use of a virtual non-volatile storage having a designated storage capacity during a subsequent communication session with the subscriber, and wherein the step of configuring comprises a step of allocating the virtual non-volatile storage to the subscriber for access and use by the subscriber during a subsequent communication session with the subscriber.

21. The method of Claim 19, wherein one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including the use of an operating system computer software program that is installable into the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber for execution by a server computer during a subsequent communication session with the subscriber, and wherein the step of configuring comprises a step of installing the operating system computer software program in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber for execution by a server computer and use by the subscriber during a subsequent communication session with the subscriber.

22. The method of Claim 19, wherein one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including the use of an

application computer software program that is installable into the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber for execution by a server computer during a subsequent communication session with the subscriber, and wherein the step of configuring comprises a step of installing the application computer software program in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber for execution by a server computer and use by the subscriber during a subsequent communication session with the subscriber.

23. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enrolling comprises the steps of receiving selected configuration options from the subscriber via the subscriber device, wherein one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including the automatic updating of an operating system computer software program stored in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber with patches therefor, and wherein the method further comprises a step of automatically updating the operating system computer software program stored in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber with patches therefor.

24. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enrolling comprises the steps of receiving selected configuration options from the subscriber via the subscriber device, wherein one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including the automatic updating of an operating system computer software program stored in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber with new versions thereof, and wherein the method further comprises a step of automatically updating the operating system computer software program stored in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber with new versions thereof.

25. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enrolling comprises the steps of receiving selected configuration options from the subscriber via the subscriber device, wherein one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including the automatic updating of an application computer software program stored in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber with patches therefor, and wherein the method further comprises a step of automatically updating the application computer

software program stored in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber with patches therefor.

26. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enrolling comprises the steps of
5 receiving selected configuration options from the subscriber via the subscriber device, wherein one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including the automatic updating of an application computer software program stored in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber with new versions thereof, and wherein the method further comprises a step of automatically updating the application
10 computer software program stored in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber with new versions thereof.

27. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enrolling comprises the steps of receiving selected configuration options from the subscriber via the subscriber device, wherein
15 one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including the automatic nightly backup of the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber, and wherein the method further comprises a step of automatically backing up the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber on a nightly basis.

20 28. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enrolling comprises the steps of receiving selected configuration options from the subscriber via the subscriber device, wherein one of the selected configuration options is indicative of the subscriber's desire to receive a virtual computing service including the automatic weekly backup of the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber, and wherein the method further comprises a step of automatically
25 backing up the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber on a weekly basis.

29. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enrolling comprises the steps of:
establishing a communication session with a subscriber device used by the subscriber;
30 causing the display of the selectable configuration options at the subscriber device;

receiving selected configuration options selected by the subscriber from the subscriber device;

determining a cost to the subscriber associated with the provision of the virtual computing services associated with the selected configuration options;

5 receiving data indicative of the subscriber's agreement to pay the cost associated with the provision of the virtual computing services associated with the selected configuration options;

storing the selected configuration options; and,

terminating the communication session with the subscriber device;

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30. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of enabling access to and use of the virtual non-volatile storage comprises the steps of:

establishing a communication session with a subscriber device used by the subscriber for the communication session;

15 determining an appropriate user interface for use by the subscriber device, the user interface having a plurality of user interface options selectable by the subscriber using the subscriber device and corresponding to respective performable tasks;

causing the display of the appropriate user interface at the subscriber device;

receiving a user interface option selected from the user interface by the

20 subscriber;

performing a task associated with the received user interface option; and,

terminating the communication session with the subscriber device.

31. The method of Claim 30, wherein the step of determining comprises the steps of:

25 collecting information from the subscriber device indicative of the subscriber device type while establishing the communication session with the subscriber device; and,

ascertaining the user interface most often used with the subscriber device type.

32. The method of Claim 30, wherein the step of determining comprises a step of

30 receiving a selection of a user interface from the subscriber via the subscriber device during the

communication session indicative of the user interface that the subscriber desires to use at the subscriber device.

33. The method of Claim 30, wherein the step of performing comprises the steps of:
5 determining whether the task associated with the received user interface option corresponds to a data file upload task; and,
upon determining that the task associated with the received user interface option corresponds to a data file upload task, causing the uploading of a data file from the subscriber device to the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber.

10 34. The method of Claim 30, wherein the step of performing comprises the steps of:
determining whether the task associated with the received user interface option corresponds to a data file download task; and,
upon determining that the task associated with the received user interface option
15 corresponds to a data file download task, causing the download of a data file from the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber to the subscriber device.

20 35. The method of Claim 30, wherein the step of performing comprises the steps of:
determining whether the task associated with the received user interface option corresponds to a request for execution of an application computer software program; and,
upon determining that the task associated with the received user interface option corresponds to a request for execution of an application computer software program installed in the virtual non-volatile storage of the subscriber, causing the execution of the application computer software program.

25 36. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for providing subscription-based virtual computing services to a subscriber, the computer-executable instructions for performing steps comprising:
enrolling a subscriber for the provision of virtual computing services to said
30 subscriber through a virtual non-volatile storage allocated to said subscriber and accessible to said subscriber via a server computer during a first communication session between said server

computer and a subscriber device used by said subscriber, said virtual computing services corresponding to configuration options selectable by said subscriber;

enabling access to and use of said virtual non-volatile storage as desired by said subscriber via said server computer during a subsequent communication session between said

5 server computer and a subscriber device used by said subscriber; and,

charging said subscriber a subscription fee in an amount related to selected configuration options received from said subscriber.

37. The computer-readable medium of Claim 36, wherein the step of enrolling
10 comprises a step of configuring said non-volatile storage with a computer software program stored therein in accordance with a configuration option selected by said subscriber, and wherein the step of enabling access to and use of said virtual non-volatile storage comprises a step of executing said computer software program in response to receipt of a direction to execute said computer software program from said subscriber during said subsequent communication session.

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38. The computer-readable medium of Claim 36, wherein the step of enabling access to and use of said virtual non-volatile storage comprises the steps of:

establishing said subsequent communication session with a subscriber device used by said subscriber for said subsequent communication session;

20 determining an appropriate user interface for use by said subscriber device, said user interface having a plurality of user interface options selectable by said subscriber using said subscriber device and corresponding to respective performable tasks;

causing the display of said appropriate user interface at said subscriber device;

25 receiving a user interface option selected from said appropriate user interface by said subscriber;

performing a task associated with said received user interface option; and,

terminating said subsequent communication session with said subscriber device.

39. The computer-readable medium of Claim 38, wherein the step of determining
30 comprises the steps of:

collecting information from said subscriber device used by said subscriber during said subsequent communication session while establishing said subsequent communication session with said subscriber device, said information being indicative of the subscriber device type of said subscriber device; and,

5 ascertaining the user interface most often used with said subscriber device type.

40. The computer-readable medium of Claim 38, wherein the step of determining comprises a step of receiving a selection of a user interface from said subscriber via said subscriber device used by said subscriber during said subsequent communication session, said
10 selection being indicative of a user interface that said subscriber desires to use at said subscriber device used by said subscriber during said subsequent communication session.